

斬り五郎は★★★★★  
して大幹部になる!!!

'Legends have a basis in both a perceived "virtual" reality and in a "true life" reality. Chris D.'s book shows both sides, which is essential in understanding how filmmaking legends are born.' – Takashi Miike (Director of Ichi, The Killer, Dead or Alive and Audition).

CHRIS D

OUTLAW MASTERS OF JAPANESE FILM

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藤原 釜足  
黒澤 明  
小栗 康平  
渡辺 邦男  
佐々木 康  
菅 公  
山田 洋次  
斎藤 寅次郎  
吉田 公三  
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藤原 釜足  
黒澤 明  
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菅 公  
山田 洋次  
斎藤 寅次郎  
吉田 公三

黒心道首

I.B. TAURIS

## **Outlaw Masters Of Japanese Film**

Dedicated to the memory of my late father, Paul R. Desjardins, 1919–2003, who went through hell his last few years and was consequently unable to finish his own book on his pioneering work in electron microscopy (in the field of plant pathology).

Also to my mother, Rosemary, who has had her own gauntlet to run in the last year and has managed to come out the other side.

Both my parents have always been loyal, loving and there for me, never turning their backs on me during my extended period of raising hell.

To my girl, Lynne Margulies, a truly great soulmate in all things, including the creative process.

And to the memory of late director Kinji Fukasaku, a great inspiration to anyone daring to think of giving up in the face of adversity. I was lucky to get to know him and to consider him as a mentor as well as a friend.

# **OUTLAW MASTERS OF JAPANESE FILM**

**CHRIS D.**

**I.B. TAURIS**

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# GLOSSARY

(There are a number of Japanese words I use in the text, some quite often, and I feel that it's important to provide this glossary. These words are presented in italics in the text. However, there are some words, such as *ninja*, *samurai*, *kabuki*, that have entered into common usage in the English language, and I do not italicize or include them here.)

- bosozoku* – teenage car and/or motorcycle gangs, often serving as apprenticeships for the *yakuza*  
*chanbara* – swordplay cinema, usually *samurai*  
*daimyo* – *samurai* lord  
*eiga* – film, movie(s)  
*gendai* – modern  
*hara-kiri* – ritual suicide with sword  
*ippiki okami* – lone wolf  
*jidai-geki* – historical period piece, usually *samurai*-oriented  
*jingi* – honor and humanity; sometimes used to signify the code of gamblers and *yakuza*  
*jitsuroku* – true account  
*kaibyō* – cat ghost  
*kaidan* – ghost story, strange tale  
*kempeitai* – military police  
*manga* – comic book  
*matatabi* – wandering, gambling swordsman  
*ninkyō* – chivalrous  
*onnagata* – male performer cast in female role; common in nineteenth-century *kabuki* theatre as well as early twentieth-century silent era films  
*oyabun* – boss  
*pink* – intense softcore porn, often with ultra-violent content  
*roman porn* – pink films with ‘romantic’ as well as S&M-styled interludes  
*ronin* – masterless *samurai*  
*shorinji kenpo* – hand-to-hand fighting and boxing style combining philosophy and martial arts  
*sukeban* – delinquent girl gang leader  
*yakuza* – gangster  
*zankoku* – cruel



## INTRODUCTION

Originally, *Outlaw Masters Of Japanese Film* was conceived not in book form but as an idea borne out of brainstorming sessions for repertory film programming between Dennis Bartok and myself way back in 1996. I had met Dennis, head programmer of The American Cinematheque in Los Angeles, in 1994, when we discovered we held a mutual interest in Japanese genre film directors from the sixties and seventies. I had then initially worked with him as a volunteer consultant, first co-programming *Days Of Snow And Blood*, a retrospective on the late Hideo Gosha in the summer of 1996. Isao Tsujimoto, who was at the time the Los Angeles director of The Japan Foundation, a worldwide cultural institution devoted to spreading Japanese popular as well as traditional culture outside Japan, was enormously enthusiastic about our ideas and provided significant support as far as grant proposal encouragement, as well as creative input on our programs. The Hideo Gosha series, composed largely of his edgy, hard-boiled samurai films as well as a couple of his *yakuza* pictures, was a success. Since all three of us were anxious to see more of the films ourselves, as well as expose them to a wider audience, we subsequently co-programmed the first Outlaw Masters series in 1997, featuring films directed by Kinji Fukasaku, Kihachi Okamoto, Eiichi Kudo, Koji Wakamatsu, Kenji Misumi, Yasuzo Masumura and Kazuo Mori. A retrospective of the films of Tai Kato followed in 1998. Since 1999, when I came on staff at The Cinematheque, we have had an Outlaw Masters Of Japanese Film series – now known simply as Japanese Outlaw Masters – nearly every year, including additional retrospectives on directors, Kinji Fukasaku and Kiyoshi Kurosawa, and such period action stars as Raizo Ichikawa and Shintaro Katsu.

Before I go any further, I should explain our definition of an ‘outlaw master’. This term is a simple way of describing the directors coming out of the Japanese movie production lines of the late fifties, the sixties and the early seventies: genre filmmakers who made genre movies usually labeled as samurai, *yakuza*, horror, *pink*, etc., but who pushed the envelope beyond the usual conventions in some way, either in style or content; or filmmakers who simply, in the tradition of great American pulp directors like Samuel Fuller, Anthony Mann, Don Siegel and Phil Karlson, just made damn fine, fast-moving pictures that could hit you squarely between the eyes and leave you breathless. They did not have to have arthouse movie pretensions. However radical their style of frame composition or editing, however daring or perverse their subject matter, these traits were virtually always borne out of intuition, an innate sense of aesthetics rather than calculation. Instinctive artists who were too often ignored, not only by critics in Japan but by Western critics as well. Although directors like Akira Kurosawa, Masaki Kobayashi,

Kon Ichikawa, Shohei Imamura and Nagisa Oshima have all made great genre pictures, or films that have brilliantly deconstructed genre, we have very rarely included their works in our Outlaw Masters series at The American Cinematheque. You will find none of them included here in this book. All of them have never had that much trouble being recognized as pantheon directors of world cinema, nor have they been ignored in print. But there are other truly great directors hailing from Japan since the fifties, directors who either toiled away or who are still toiling away in the salt mines of debased genre, who are only now sporadically starting to get their long-overdue recognition.

All the filmmakers in this volume represent Japanese ‘outlaw filmmaking’ in one way or another. Some, like Kinji Fukasaku and Junya Sato, have redefined genre, especially the *yakuza* film, by unobtrusively creating a tapestry of socio-economic backstory and thus a political context for their ferocious, ultra-violent studies of the Japanese underworld. Others, such as Eiichi Kudo and Kazuo Ikehiro, helped to pioneer a hard-won intelligence and realism in period samurai pictures when the studios were still too often pushing the tried-and-true formulaic and sentimental. Kihachi Okamoto, like Seijun Suzuki, brought a bracing irreverence and kinetic energy to his genre pictures, and was able to swing brilliantly from biting satire in one film to tragic realism in the next with deceptive ease. Yasuharu Hasebe was an unpretentious connoisseur of the action picture, adept at turning out tongue-in-cheek soufflés as well as his more usual hard-boiled crime dramas. Teruo Ishii was a unique example of an independent director who was able, through some sleight of hand, to work successfully within the studio system for decades, biding his time through occasional hack work, but more often bringing his offbeat sensibilities and visual signature to everything he did. He was also a pioneer of integrating and updating the erotic/grotesque tradition of nineteenth-century kabuki into a number of Grand Guignol films in the sixties and seventies. Seijun Suzuki was another independent director who worked for over a decade in the studio system, but someone who was ultimately more confrontational and less willing to play the game than Teruo Ishii. He was devoted to pushing the envelope until it tore, and, when that finally happened, his studio employers fired him. From his third picture on, his films are astounding examples of often hackneyed material rehabilitated to the point of being nearly unrecognizable, all unpretentious genre pieces rendered fresh and supremely entertaining, faithful to genre expectations but somehow simultaneously mind-bending deconstructions. Masahiro Shinoda was a borderline case, someone who, at first glance, seemed to be too much in the ‘arthouse’ mold. But ultimately his nihilistic, cosmically existential and complex world-view won out. The fact, too, is that he has been repeatedly ignored by many film journalists and critics in the last 20 years, writers whose subject is ‘serious’ Japanese cinema and who should know better. Although he has made many non-genre pictures, his unusual genre masterpieces *Tears On The Lion’s Mane*, *Assassination*, *Samurai Spy*, *Under The Cherry Blossoms*, *Demon Pond* and – especially – *Pale Flower* have remained comparatively unknown

and unappreciated in the West. I suppose one could also argue that Koji Wakamatsu is another borderline inclusion. At first glance, Wakamatsu would seem to inhabit that shadowy movie underworld that could best be described as Japanese underground cinema, an arena that has seen numerous ‘outlaw’ geniuses shoot comet-like through its firmament, from the likes of writer/directors Shuji Terayama and Toshio Matsumoto to Masao Adachi and Atsushi Yamatoya. But Wakamatsu, without question, was the most successful, not only in terms of output – well over 100 films – but also in terms of influence. Working in debased and despised forms, from the violent *pink* film to ‘true account’ serial killer pictures, he has brought a startling, visceral and uncompromising social, psychological and political context to nearly all his films (at least, the large handful that I have seen). He has, over the years, counted controversial, respected directors like Nagisa Oshima and Kinji Fukasaku as friends and associates, as well as more radical artists like Masao Adachi.

I also felt that it was imperative that at least two performers – one male, one female – from the golden age of ‘outlaw’ genre pictures be included here. Though not filmmakers themselves, Shinichi ‘Sonny’ Chiba and Meiko Kaji helped to shape and mold nearly all their projects once they found themselves stars, pictures that were largely action genre efforts tailored specifically to their larger-than-life charisma. Both are continuing to grow in reputation as their films receive a wider and wider audience all over the world.

But the ‘outlaw’ sensibility, despite the economic hard times for the Japanese film industry, did not die and fizzle out at the end of the seventies. The ‘outlaw’ spirit in genre pictures germinated and grew like some impossible-to-kill virus culture, blossoming again since the late eighties with films shot directly for video as well as the occasional theatrical release. Individuality and independence has flourished in the nineties through to the present with a new generation of Japanese ‘outlaw’ filmmakers, represented here by Takashi Miike and Kiyoshi Kurosawa. Both, in their own way, are mavericks, with unassuming yet fiercely opinionated ideas about genre filmmaking. Both have turned out films that are astonishing deconstructions and reinterpretations of genre cinema. And yet both still deliver faithfully to those anticipating an exciting genre picture. Like many of their predecessors mentioned above, they deserve inclusion in this book because they are able to simultaneously destroy and rebuild genre expectations within the duration of a single, exhilarating motion picture.

In each chapter that follows, you will find an essay briefly discussing the respective director’s sensibilities, descriptions of a number of his films and a filmography as well as an interview with the filmmaker.

I have to report with some sadness and frustration that there are a number of filmmakers I would have liked to include here but who, due to matters of space, had to be omitted. I had especially planned on including an essay and a filmography on each of the four directors who are amongst my favorite Japanese ‘outlaw’ filmmakers. All four – Hideo Gosha, Kenji Misumi, Yasuzo Masumura and Tai Kato – have been

deceased for a number of years and interviews were, of course, unavailable. They more than deserve inclusion here. Perhaps one day I'll be able to devote an entire volume not only to these four but to all the rest who didn't make it in, many others from the 1950s through to the 1970s. Filmmakers such as Nobuo Nakagawa, Kosaku Yamashita, Norifumi Suzuki, Sadao Nakajima, Kimiyoshi Yasuda, Kazuo Mori, Tokuzo Tanaka, Akira Inoue, Toshio Masuda, Keiichi Ozawa, Takumi Furukawa, Hiroshi Noguchi, Takashi Nomura, Shugoro Nishimura, Kaneto Shindo, Buichi Saito, Junji Kurata, Shigehiro Ozawa, Makoto Naito, Kazuhiko Yamaguchi, Ishiro Honda, Jun Fukuda and Motomu 'Tan' Iida, to name a few, as well as such directors from the 1990s and beyond as Shinya Tsukamoto, 'Beat' Takeshi Kitano, Takashi Ishii, Hideo Nakata, Rokuro Mochizuki and Sogo Ishii.

There are also unsung performers from Japanese genre cinema who deserve to be looked at and appreciated for their enormous contributions: such stars as Ken Takakura, Koji Tsuruta, Shintaro Katsu, Raizo Ichikawa, Bunta Sugawara, Noboru Ando, Tomisaburo Wakayama, Tetsuro Tanba, Hiroki Matsukata, Joe Shishido, Tetsuya Watari, Hideki Takahashi, Junko Fuji, Yumiko Nogawa, Michiyo Yasuda, Kyoko Enami, Reiko Ike, Miki Sugimoto, Hiroko Ogi, Junko Miyazono and Reiko Oshida – once again, to name only a few.

# 1

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## Kinji Fukasaku

1930–2003

Kinji Fukasaku was still directing the sequel to *Battle Royale*, *Battle Royale 2*, mere days before his death from cancer at the age of 72 in January, 2003. Even though his doctors had recommended that he curtail his workload with the hope of prolonging his life, the director had decided to ignore them and try to get one more movie under his belt before he shuffled off this mortal coil. It must have been especially frustrating for him, as he'd beaten the disease earlier in the decade and had barely slowed down his film career at the time. He'd also been a very active head of the Japanese Director's Guild since 1996.

Fukasaku directed his initial five films in 1961, the first four of which – two *Wandering Detective* and two *Vigilante With The Funky Hat* pictures – were short, barely 60-minute-long programmers designed to fill out the second half of Toei studios' double bills. His fifth film and first at feature length was *High Noon For Gangsters*, an anarchic, pull-out-the-stops gang heist movie filled to the brim with wild ideas and daringly offbeat juxtapositions. One element that is still relevant today shows the cynical, manipulating leader (Tetsuro Tanba) using the racist tension generated by two gang members, a southern cracker (Danny Yuma) who is jealous of his nympho wife's attention to a black GI deserter (Isaac Saxon), to keep the whole gang slightly off-kilter and under his thumb.

It never fails to amaze me that Fukasaku was able to integrate his provocative ideas about social injustice and the oppressive political and economic environment in Japan into many of his earliest films. *The Proud Challenge* is another example, the story of a reporter (Koji Tsuruta), blacklisted for his Communist Party ties, trying to expose a plot between Japanese politicians and the CIA to transfer weapons through Japan into Southeast Asia.

Fukasaku was one of the pioneering *yakuza* film directors trying to introduce a realistic ambience into gangster movies, something that would come to be labeled as *jitsuroku* when the trend really caught on in the early seventies. Fukasaku was at

the head of the pack, unleashing such uncompromising films for the time period as *League Of Gangsters* and *Wolves, Pigs And People*. *Wolves* especially is one of the grittiest, angriest *yakuza* films ever made in Japan. It's as potent as any of his later mid-seventies pictures, with a lone wolf (Ken Takakura) plotting with his girlfriend (Sanae Nakahara) and an avaricious thug (Shinjiro Ebara) to trick his kid brother's (Kinya Kitaoji) delinquent gang to help them rip off a money courier at the airport. Things go wrong when Kitaoji's bunch return to the hideout, with the precious briefcase, before Takakura and discover just how much money was *really* involved. The kids hide the loot but get caught by Takakura and Ebara, who imprison them in a ramshackle warehouse, torturing them for the money's whereabouts. Meanwhile, their big brother (Rentaro Mikuni), a member of the gang that's been ripped off, is pressured to find his brothers and get back the cash. What ensues is a grueling contest of wills as all three brothers have to decide what is ultimately important to them. Events spiral out of control as filial ties crumble, ending in bloody, downbeat fashion. Awe-inspiring, topped off with Isao Tomita's amazing hybrid score of lounge jazz, Coltranesque squawk and distorted surf guitar.

Fukasaku continued to insert hot potato issues into his pictures. In *Ceremony Of Disbanding*, freshly unaffiliated gang member Koji Tsuruta becomes disillusioned with an old comrade and neophyte gang boss (Fumio Watanabe) when he decides to bid on the construction of gross-polluting factories in a poor neighborhood that is already surrounded by environmentally unsafe plants. Tsuruta not only identifies with the inhabitants but is upset because his old flame and her son live there. Tsuruta is ready to resort to violence with his estranged pal, but a young, rival gangbanger beats him to it, fatally stabbing Watanabe before his very eyes. Tsuruta realizes the boy is from the opposing mob and heads over to their HQ, where he not only wipes them out before being mortally wounded but also kills two corrupt politicians who'd instigated the bidding war.

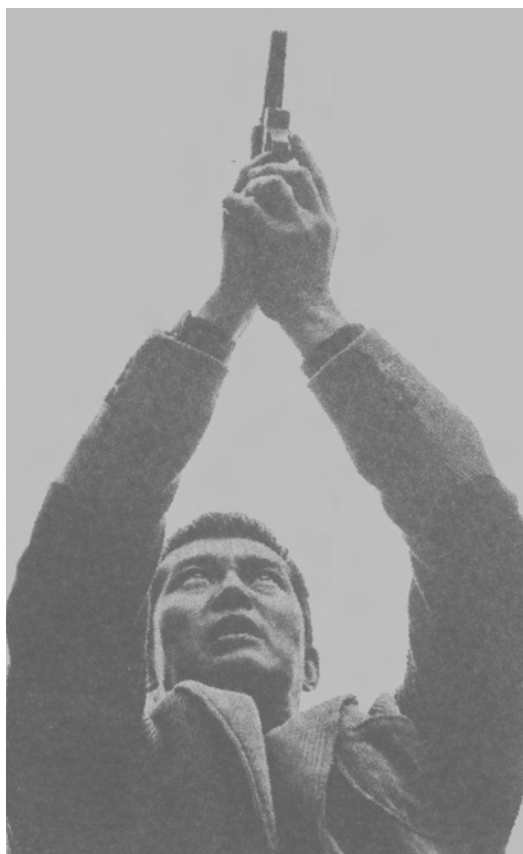
The following year, 1968, Fukasaku continued to direct cutting-edge *yakuza* pictures for Toei, but also accepted an offer from Shochiku studios to helm an adaptation of famed mystery writer Edogawa Rampo's *Black Lizard* from a stage play by Yukio Mishima. Isao Kimura portrays shy, stubborn detective Akechi, who plunges down a rabbit hole of psychedelic depravity in his quest for female jewel thief Black Lizard (played by famous drag star Akihiro Maruyama).

*Black Lizard* was an unqualified success, so Shochiku asked Fukasaku to do another picture with the star, Maruyama, right away, utilizing a similar approach. To his credit, he did not want to jump right into something without adequate preparation. He prudently realized he would need time to make sure the sequel was done correctly. Shochiku already had the rights to another property, a crime scenario, and asked Fukasaku to undertake it in the interim. This became *Blackmail Is My Life*, which follows the exploits of a young up-from-the-slums swinger (Hiroki Matsukata) who will do nearly anything to keep his freewheeling lifestyle intact. His lucky streak of blackmailing unravels in vicious fashion when he and

partners (Tomomi Sato et al.) unwisely target business allies of a powerful, behind-the-scenes political boss (Tetsuro Tanba).

Somehow Fukasaku also found time to direct the wild and woolly space opera *The Green Slime* the same year, an American–Japanese co-production starring Robert Horton, Luciana Paluzzi and Richard Jaeckel. It was a film that caused him considerable embarrassment in later years, in spite of the fact that many of his biggest fans, including Quentin Tarantino, have professed their love for the fast-moving, over-the-top monster fest. Personally, it's my favorite of Fukasaku's handful of science fiction movies.

Finally, Fukasaku felt ready to proceed with the second Maruyama project at Shochiku, and returned the next year to lens *Black Rose Mansion*. This time the story concerned a wealthy, introspective businessman (Eitaro Ozawa) who installs chanteuse 'Black Rose' (Akihiro Maruyama) in his elegant private men's club to attract customers, but is alarmed when she also lures scores of homicidal past lovers. Ozawa realizes too late that not only he but his wastrel son (Masakazu Tamura) as well have both fallen for the femme fatale.



Tetsuya Watari in *Graveyard Of Honor*

Fukasaku also directed *Boss* in 1969, the first installment of Toei's new contemporary *yakuza* series, *Japan's Violent Gangs*, a kind of *jitsuroku/ninkyō* hybrid with Koji Tsuruta as a world-weary gang boss returning from prison who finds that the newly allied corporate gangs have left little breathing room. Little by little, his gang is chipped away, with an underboss played by Bunta Sugawara the first to bite the dust. Tsuruta hopes to find common ground with the elder sharks dominating the waters and consults with an old friend (Ryohei Uchida) who is employed by the head godfather (Asao Uchida). But things don't go smoothly for long. Strangely enough, Tsuruta uncovers an ally in the bullying, drug-addicted boss (Tomisaburo Wakayama) of a bunch of rebellious misfits. Still, one by one the dominoes fall until only Tsuruta is left. He meets Ryohei Uchida outside a mob gathering, duels with him, and Uchida gallantly gives up his life to save his friend. He knows his new bosses are scum and wants to leave an unobstructed path for Tsuruta to assassinate them. Which Tsuruta does before being overwhelmed.

Fukasaku returned briefly to Shochiku in 1970 to direct the restless youth fable *If You Were Young – Rage*, tracking a closely-knit crew of hard-up young men who pool their resources to buy a dump truck but are soon torn apart in a chaos of class turmoil and youthful indiscretion. One of the boys perishes in a violent workers' demonstration, another is arrested for robbery, and a third gets married. The remaining two (Tetsuo Ishidate and Gin Maeda) try to persevere, but nightmarish complications set in when their jailed comrade escapes from prison. A vitriolic indictment of post-war Japan's absence of opportunity for young people.

Koji Tsuruta returns in *Gambler – Foreign Opposition* (aka *Sympathy For The Underdog*), one of the few entries in the *Gambler* series not devoted to a pre-WW2 period *ninkyō* saga. Tsuruta is banished by mainland *yakuza* to Okinawa where he ends up getting together with sympathetic friends (Noboru Ando and Asao Koike) and a belligerent youth (Tsunehiko Watase). All too soon, homicidal fireworks with not just the local gang led by scarred, one-armed Tomisaburo Wakayama, but American gangsters, too, suck the wind out of their sails. Even worse, hard-earned gains are threatened when the corporate mainland boss (Asao Uchida) unexpectedly arrives at the climax with his gangster minions. Brutally unrepentant with a subtle sense of humor.

Fukasaku has mentioned in several interviews that he feels 1972 was a turning point in his career, finally giving him almost total control over his projects. In *Under The Fluttering Military Flag*, one of his favorite, most personal pictures, a WW2 widow (Sachiko Hidari) pieces together the Rashomon-style puzzle of her soldier husband's (Tetsuro Tanba) fate through a bureaucratic maze and the contradictory recollections of surviving comrades. What emerges is a catch-22 struggle against madness as she learns Tanba had been executed for killing his insane commanding officer (Shinjiro Ebara), a man guilty of murdering his own men if they failed to follow orders. Fukasaku almost always shared screenwriting credit on his films, and this scathing anti-war indictment was co-written by director Kaneto Shindo.

*Street Mobster*, the sixth and final entry in Toei's *Modern Yakuza* series, looks at an arrogant wannabe (Bunta Sugawara) who rockets his way up out of the gutter into bigger rackets only to be constantly beaten down by the established gang. The mob boss (Noboru Ando), who remembers what it was like to be down and out, is fond of Sugawara despite his big mouth, but Sugawara's dissolute lifestyle, murderously jealous girl (Mayumi Nagisa, in a bravura performance) and messed-up pals prove his undoing. Nothing can stop the death-dealing that ensues in this classic, what amounts to a dry run for *Graveyard Of Honor*.

In 1973 Fukasaku undertook what was to become one of the most acclaimed *yakuza* films ever made. *Battles Without Honor And Humanity* was adapted from a series of articles by Koichi Iiboshi, a journalist and former *yakuza* recounting the genesis and gang wars of several prominent, post-WW2 Hiroshima *yakuza* families. Working from a scorching script by Kazuo Kasahara, Fukasaku follows a rootless ex-soldier (Bunta Sugawara) as he wanders through the chaos of a destroyed Hiroshima, finally falling in with a *yakuza* gang led by weaselly Nobuo Kaneko. He becomes blood brothers with a member of another gang (Tatsuo Umemiya) while in prison. When again briefly free, we see Sugawara's rise in the ranks, Umemiya's eventual death and another comrade, hot-headed Hiroki Matsukata, splitting off from Kaneko's bunch. When Sugawara is paroled again in the mid-fifties, he finds things changed and is disheartened at the factional infighting that has fragmented his former gang. Kaneko tries to manipulate him into killing Matsukata, who now has his own up-and-coming mob, but Sugawara is non-committal. Kaneko succeeds in getting someone else, and they catch Matsukata at his most vulnerable while he's shopping for a doll for his adopted daughter's birthday. Sugawara goes to his funeral, and the bosses attending, including craven Kaneko, panic as he pulls out his gun. But he shoots up the funeral altar where the hypocritical bosses have paid tribute, effectively rendering meaningless the idea of *jingi* (gang code of ethics).

The film was a huge success, and Toei turned it into a series, with Fukasaku once more at the helm for *Battles 2*, *Hiroshima Death Match*. Sugawara is something of a tangential character, observing the plight of a young outcast (Kinya Kitaoji) with low self-esteem who is constantly beaten by a sadistic



Akihiro Maruyama in  
*Black Lizard*

neighborhood tough (Sonny Chiba). Kitaoji joins the gang of a callous boss (Hiroshi Nawa) and ends up falling in love with his browbeaten daughter (Meiko Kaji). At the climax, trying to ingratiate himself, Kitaoji makes a hit at Nawa's request, then hides in an abandoned restaurant. When the police close in, he blows his brains out.

Fukasaku and Kasahara continued the gritty *jitsuroku* exploration through the fifth entry, *Saga Conclusion*. All are exemplary examples of hard-boiled *yakuza* realism, featuring not only Toei performers like Sugawara, Umemiya and Matsukata but also such former Nikkatsu stars as Akira Kobayashi and Joe Shishido. When Toei wished to do more films in the series, calling it *New Battles Without Honor And Humanity*, Fukasaku and the star, Sugawara, signed on. However, this time a fresh squad of writers joined the ranks, including such veteran *yakuza* film scribes as Fumio Konami, Koji Takada and Susumu Saji. Once the sixth, seventh and eighth (and supposedly final) film had been lensed, Toei decided that they still wanted more. Fukasaku demurred, and Eiichi Kudo was drafted to direct the final installment, *Aftermath Of Battles Without Honor And Humanity*.

All eight of Fukasaku's *Battles* entries, taken either alone or together, are an astounding achievement. But, right in the midst of the series, Fukasaku conjured up another *yakuza* picture that eclipsed them all, a white-hot blast furnace of a movie that left only scorched earth in its wake. Based on a real-life character from Fukasaku's own home district of Mito, *Graveyard Of Honor* tracks the post-WW2 progress of alternately monstrous/bewildered Rikuo Ishikawa (Tetsuya Watari), a sociopathic loser who can't seem to get along with even his misfit *yakuza* pals. A humiliating scolding by his boss (Hajime Hana) leads to Ishikawa returning later with mayhem in mind, but the boss escapes mortal injury. With a contract out on him, Ishikawa takes refuge with a gentle woman (Yumi Takigawa) he'd once raped, and soon they develop as close as Ishikawa will ever come to a 'normal' relationship. He does the pinkie-trimming *yakuza* method of apology for his boss, and it brings an uneasy truce, but Ishikawa remains a shunned outcast. After being introduced to the dubious pleasures of heroin by a junkie whore (Meiko Seri, in a haunting scene), he begins hanging out with a ne'er-do-well addict (Kunie Tanaka). Ishikawa's addiction sinks him deeper into an abyss of self-pity that has him assassinating his best friend (Tatsuo Umemiya) over an imagined slight. At the same time, his girl, Takigawa, has caught tuberculosis from him, and Ishikawa wakes up one morning to find that she's slashed her wrists. Living in a hell largely of his own making, Ishikawa starts to go over the edge. When he begins to eat his girlfriend's bones after her cremation, his former gangmates plot his death. But they have to postpone their plan when Ishikawa and his junkie buddy barricade themselves inside their ramshackle crash pad in a shootout with the cops – something which Ishikawa manages to escape. Miraculously, Fukasaku's non-manipulative direction and Watari's painfully felt performance somehow manage to elicit compassion as well as horror at this inhuman monster. There's a scene near the end where Ishikawa is returning from a tombstone engraver, his impotent attempt to atone for his behavior towards his

girl and murdered friend, when he stops in a back alley to fix. Suddenly he's ambushed by his former comrades, knifed repeatedly and left for dead. As he lies bleeding in the mud he looks up at the sky, and we see his point of view of a balloon floating in the azure blue. Accompanied by Toshiaki Tsushima's lyrical score, the viewer experiences one of cinema's most memorably heartbreaking moments. Amazingly, Ishikawa still doesn't die, finally jumping to his death from a prison hospital roof, landing in a literal explosion of blood.

In *State Police Vs. Organized Crime*, a live-and-let-live police detective (Bunta Sugawara) has his friendship with a *yakuza* drinking buddy (Hiroki Matsukata) destroyed by internecine gang warfare and the intervention of his supervisor (Tatsuo Umemiya), an anti-corruption crusader. Sugawara's police detective is one of those unsung anti-heroes, a man who remains true to himself because he believes more in human decency than he does in duty to his predominantly cold-hearted, bureaucratic colleagues. And, for that, he pays the ultimate price. An unsentimental, realistic dissection of the often strange symbiosis of Japan's law enforcement and underworld.

What was explored with a more omniscient viewpoint in *State Police* is looked at from a hot-blooded perspective in *Yakuza Burial*. This was Fukasaku and Tetsuya Watari's follow-up to *Graveyard Of Honor*, and Watari is astonishing as a brooding, maverick cop who doesn't have any patience for the niceties of bureaucratic red tape.

To his chagrin, he gradually realizes he has more in common with his *yakuza* nemesis (Tatsuo Umemiya) and the estranged wife (Meiko Kaji) of Umemiya's imprisoned boss. When Watari's supervisor (Mikio Narita) comes down hard on him, Watari initially thinks it's because he's become Umemiya's drinking buddy and Kaji's lover. But it becomes clear that high-ranking cops have established a tacit alliance with Umemiya's main rival, a politically savvy gang boss (Kei Sato), to help control street crime. When Watari hides Umemiya after he's been wounded in the ensuing gang war, Sato's gang kidnaps Watari and forcibly addicts him to heroin. As a result, Umemiya is ambushed and killed, and Kaji almost shoots drugged-up Watari believing he's the betrayer. We learn that she, herself, has been a closet junkie all along to deal with not just the criminal chaos around her but her own dispossessed Korean heritage. Watari has Kaji drive him to police HQ, goes upstairs to where boss Sato is in conference and empties his gun into him in front of his shocked police superiors. He then calmly leaves. Watari's former partner (Hideo Murota) follows him outside and shoots him in front of Kaji. Watari dies in her arms. A fascinating and emotionally exhausting flip side to the *Dirty Harry* archetype.

Fukasaku also made two very entertaining *yakuza* caper movies in 1975 and 1976, *Gambling Den Heist* and *Violent Panic – The Big Crash*, the latter being one of his wildest action films with the last third a non-stop demolition derby through the city as protagonists Tsunehiko Watase and Miki Sugimoto attempt to escape a lunatic caravan of covetous *yakuza*, police, TV reporters, bikers and independent thieves who are all attempting to get their hands on Watase's huge bank haul.

*Hokuriku Proxy War* was another *jitsuroku yakuza* blitzkrieg, this time set in a snowy Hokkaido coastal town where a murderously independent *yakuza* boss (Hiroki Matsukata) is bent on gaining tighter control of the territory. Sonny Chiba is slickly venal as an oily, smooth-talking gangster and Ko Nishimura convincing as always, as an elder boss obstinately sticking to his guns. The splendid Yumiko Nogawa unfortunately doesn't have much to do. Filmed on actual Hokkaido locations, the stormy winter atmosphere is savage and palpably chilling, giving the cold-blooded brutality on display a teeth-chattering edge.

Although Fukasaku did not direct many *jidai-geki* films, the ones he *did* do were generally designed as all-star epics. In *Shogun's Samurai*, a fanatical, power-obsessed Lord Yagyu (Kinnosuke Yorozyua Nakamura) will do anything to keep the disfigured, going-mad Shogun (Hiroki Matsukata) in office, including genocide and warring with his own son, one-eyed Jubei (Sonny Chiba). This was the feature-length film version of a phenomenally popular seventies Japanese TV show, *Yagyu Clan Conspiracy*. At Toei's behest, Fukasaku also directed his own version of *The Loyal 47 Ronin* the same year, *The Fall Of Ako Castle*. The all-star cast was headed by Kinnosuke Yorozyua, Sonny Chiba and Mieko Harada, and eschewed much of the sentimental, elegiac elements that helped to capsize many of the other versions of *Chushingura* that have been produced since the silent era.

*Message From Space* was the big-screen counterpart of another popular Japanese TV series known as *Swords Of The Space Ark*. Vic Morrow, Sonny Chiba and Hiroyuki Sanada lead the cast of interplanetary heroes in response to a distress signal from a planet in trouble in an imaginative, *Star Wars*-inspired sci-fi/fantasy. Be forewarned, though, that the voice dubbing in the English-language version of *Message* is some of the worst the viewer will ever encounter. That, in concert with the only so-so effects and grating-on-the-eyes production design, makes this one of Fukasaku's few hard-to-sit-through films.

Between 1980 and 1983 Fukasaku labored on three productions for the very hands-on producer Haruki Kadokawa, the self-made head of a vast publishing empire that often produced movie versions of their most successful best-sellers. Although Kadokawa films from the nineties have often been good to excellent (the original version of *Ring* directed by Hideo Nakata is a prime example), his efforts in the eighties were a decidedly more mixed bag. *Virus*, *Samurai Reincarnation* and *Legend Of The Eight Samurai* are all epics, and they all suffer from an overly ambitious vision without an adequate-size budget or shooting schedule to properly address that vision. All three have moments of power and patches that are very entertaining. In some ways, *Virus* is the most watchable. It's the chronicle of a germ warfare accident that goes unreported due to the fear of political repercussions, and, as a consequence, only a mere handful of people are left on earth before the last frame unspools. *Samurai Reincarnation* features Sonny Chiba again as Jubei Yagyu, but this time he's up against an executed Christian samurai, Amakusa Shiro Tokisada (Kenji Sawada), who has come back from the dead. Making a pact with the devil, Tokisada

has resurrected three of Japan's most famous swordsmen, including Musashi Miyamoto (Ken Ogata in one of the most God-awful wigs you'll ever see in any movie). Collaborating with cinematographer Kiyoshi Hasegawa and art director Tokumichi Igawa, Fukasaku establishes a hypnotic blend of kabuki theatricality, bone-crunching martial arts mayhem, dreamlike erotica and creepy supernatural horror. *Legend Of The Eight Samurai* was the latest version of *Satomi Hakkenden*, a famous samurai legend incorporating sword-and-sorcery-style fantasy. However, not only are some of the production values questionable, the English-language version is almost impossible to sit through.

In 1992 Fukasaku returned to crime action films with *Triple Cross*, a tale of labyrinthine relationships and gruelling violence punctuated with dark humor. A wronged lone wolf (Kenichi Hagiwara), a bleached-blond pretty-boy conman, his savvy, punk rock girlfriend, a coked-out hitman (Yoshio Harada), a Japanese heavy metal band and a small-time *yakuza* clan all vie for the possession of a treasure trove of cash. The last half-hour is non-stop mayhem, with some out-of-control Hong Kong action influence blended in with old-school, seventies-style brutality.

With *Crest Of Betrayal*, Fukasaku cultivated a hothouse hybrid of two of the most famous Japanese period stories, *Ghost Of Yotsuya* (*Yotsuya Kaidan*) and *The Loyal 47 Ronin* (*Chushingura*). Koichi Sato is Iemon, one of the 47 masterless samurai plotting revenge after their lord is forced to commit *hara-kiri*. He is also being haunted by Oiwa, the wife he murdered to marry an insane rich girl, Oume. Phantasmagorical imagery, swordfights and colorful kabuki production design mingle in this examination of the spiritual microcosm of the feudal psyche.

*Battle Royale* was Fukasaku's last fully completed picture, and it stands as one of his most uncompromising, an ultra-controversial, action-packed examination of the institutionalization of violence. A fascist teacher (Beat Takeshi Kitano) maniacally leads his high school class on a government-sponsored survival-of-the-fittest experiment on a desert island. Over-the-top carnage escalates into an apocalyptic climax; 40 years after bursting on the Japanese film scene, a testament that the maestro had lost none of his fiery social conscience or subversive dark humor.

### KINJI FUKASAKU – COMPLETE FILMOGRAPHY

- 1961      *WANDERING DETECTIVE – TRAGEDY IN RED VALLEY (FURAIBO TANTEI – AKAI TANI NO SANGEKI)*  
*WANDERING DETECTIVE – BLACK WIND IN THE HARBOR (FURAIBO TANTEI – MISAKI O WATARU KUROI KAZE)*  
*VIGILANTE WITH A FUNKY HAT (FUNKI HATTO NO KAI DANJI)*  
*VIGILANTE WITH A FUNKY HAT – THE 200,000 YEN ARM (FUNKI HATTO NO KAI DANJI – NISENMAN-EN NO UDE)*  
*HIGH NOON FOR GANGSTERS (HAKUCHU NO BURAIKAN, aka VILLAINS IN BROAD DAYLIGHT)*

## OUTLAW MASTERS OF JAPANESE FILM

- 1962 *THE PROUD CHALLENGE (HOKORI TAKAKI CHOSEN)*  
*GANG VS. G-MEN (GYANGU TAI G-MEN)*
- 1963 *LEAGUE OF GANGSTERS (GYANGU DOMEI)*
- 1964 *JAKOMAN AND TETSU (JAKOMAN TO TETSU, aka ONE-EYED CAPTAIN AND TETSU)*  
*WOLVES, PIGS AND PEOPLE (OKAMI TO BUTA TO NINGEN)*
- 1966 *THE THREAT (ODOSHI)*  
*KAMIKAZE MAN – DUEL AT NOON (KAMIKAZE YARO – MAHIRU NO KETTO)*  
*RAMPAGING DRAGON OF THE NORTH (HOKKAI NO ABARE RYU)*
- 1967 *CEREMONY OF DISBANDING (KAISANSHIKI)*
- 1968 *GAMBLERS' CEREMONY OF DISBANDING (BAKUTO KAISANSHIKI)*  
 [Note: this is not a mistake; this film is different from the preceding title.]  
*BLACK LIZARD (KURO TOKAGE)*  
*BLACKMAIL IS MY LIFE (KYOKATSU KOSO WAGA JINSEI)*  
*THE GREEN SLIME (GAMMA DAISAN GO – UCHU DAI SAKUSEN, aka GAMMA #3 – COSMIC WAR)*
- 1969 *BLACK ROSE MANSION (KUROBARA NO YAKATA)*  
*JAPAN'S VIOLENT GANGS – BOSS (NIHON BORYOKUDAN – KUMICHO, aka JAPAN'S ORGANIZED CRIME BOSS)*
- 1970 *BLOODSTAINED CLAN HONOR (CHIZOME NO DAIMON, aka BLOODSTAINED CREST, aka BLOODY GAMBLES)*  
*IF YOU WERE YOUNG – RAGE! (KIMI GA WAKAMONO NARA)*  
*TORA! TORA! TORA! [Co-directed with Richard Fleischer and Toshio Masuda]*
- 1971 *GAMBLER – FOREIGN OPPOSITION (BAKUTO GAIJIN BUTAI, aka YAKUZA COMBAT FORCES, aka GAMBLERS IN OKINAWA, aka SYMPATHY FOR THE UNDERDOG)*
- 1972 *UNDER THE FLUTTERING MILITARY FLAG (GUNKI HATAMEKU MOTO NI)*  
*STREET MOBSTER (GENDAI YAKUZA – HITOKIRI YOTA, aka MODERN YAKUZA – OUTLAW KILLER)*  
*OUTLAW KILLER – THREE MADDOG BROTHERS (HITOKIRI YOTA – KYOKEN SAN KYODAI)*
- 1973 *BATTLES WITHOUT HONOR AND HUMANITY (JINGINAKI TATAKAI)*  
*BATTLES WITHOUT HONOR AND HUMANITY – HIROSHIMA DEATH MATCH (JINGINAKI TATAKAI – HIROSHIMA SHITO HEN)*  
*BATTLES WITHOUT HONOR AND HUMANITY – AGENT OF WAR (JINGINAKI TATAKAI – DAIRI SENSO)*
- 1974 *BATTLES WITHOUT HONOR AND HUMANITY – SUMMIT OF OPERATIONS (JINGINAKI TATAKAI – CHOJO SAKUSEN, aka POLICE TACTICS)*  
*BATTLES WITHOUT HONOR AND HUMANITY – SAGA CONCLUSION (JINGINAKI TATAKAI – KANKETSU HEN)*  
*NEW BATTLES WITHOUT HONOR AND HUMANITY (SHIN JINGINAKI TATAKAI)*

- 1975 *GRAVEYARD OF HONOR (JINGI NO HAKABA)*  
*STATE POLICE VS. ORGANIZED CRIME (KENKEI TAI SOSHIKI BORYOKU, aka COPS VS. THUGS)*  
*GAMBLING DEN HEIST (SHIKINGEN GODATSU)*  
*NEW BATTLES WITHOUT HONOR AND HUMANITY – THE BOSS’S HEAD (SHIN JINGINAKI TATAKAI – KUMICHO NO KUBI)*
- 1976 *VIOLENT PANIC – THE BIG CRASH (BOSO PANIKKU – DAI GEKITOTSU)*  
*NEW BATTLES WITHOUT HONOR AND HUMANITY – THE BOSS’S LAST DAYS (SHIN JINGINAKI TATAKAI – KUMICHO SAIGO NO HI)*  
*YAKUZA BURIAL – JASMINE FLOWER (YAKUZA NO HAKABA – KUCHINASHI NO HANA)*  
*HOKURIKU PROXY WAR (HOKURIKU DAIRI SENSO, aka HOKURIKU GANG WAR, aka AGENT OF WAR OF THE NORTH)*
- 1977 *DOBERMAN DETECTIVE (DOOBERMAN DEKA)*
- 1978 *SHOGUN’S SAMURAI (YAGYU ICHIZOKU NO INBO, aka YAGYU CLAN CONSPIRACY)*  
*MESSAGE FROM SPACE (UCHU KARA NO MESSEJI)*  
*THE FALL OF AKO CASTLE (AKO DANZETSU)*
- 1980 *VIRUS (FUKKATSU NO HI)*
- 1981 *SAMURAI REINCARNATION (MAKAI TENSHO, aka RESURRECTION OF EVIL)*  
*GATE OF YOUTH (SEISHUN NO MON)*
- 1982 *DOTONBORI RIVER (DOTONBORIGAWA)*  
*THE FALL GUY (KAMATA KOSHIN KYOKU)*
- 1983 *THEATER OF LIFE (JINSEI GEKIJŌ)* [Co-directed with Sadao Nakajima and Junya Sato]  
*LEGEND OF EIGHT SAMURAI (SATOMI HAKKENDEN, aka STORY OF EIGHT DOGS – CARDINAL VIRTUES)*
- 1984 *SHANGHAI RHAPSODY (SHANGHAI BANSU KINGU, aka SHANGHAI VANCE KING)*
- 1986 *HOUSE ON FIRE (KATAKU NO HITO)*
- 1987 *SURE DEATH 4 – REVENGE (HISSATSU! 4 – URAMI HARASHIMASU)*
- 1988 *FLOWER OF CHAOS (HANA NO RAN)*
- 1992 *TRIPLE CROSS (ITSUKA GIRAGIRA SURU HI, aka THE DAY’S TOO BRIGHT)*
- 1994 *CREST OF BETRAYAL (CHUSHINGURA GAIDEN – YOTSUYA KAIDAN, aka LOYAL 47 RONIN – YOTSUYA GHOST STORY)*
- 1999 *THE GEISHA HOUSE (OMOCHA)*
- 2000 *BATTLE ROYALE*
- 2003 *BATTLE ROYALE 2* [Kinji’s son, Kenta, who co-wrote the screenplays to both *Battle Royale* films with his father, took over the directorial reins when Kinji died early on in the production]

## KINJI FUKASAKU – INTERVIEWS

*The following interview took place in the early summer of 1997 beside the Beverly Hilton's deserted swimming pool (it was overcast and rather cool). Toshiko Adilman, Kinji's long-time friend and translator, visiting from Toronto, did the on-site translation.*

CD: Tell me about the first two films you directed, the pair of Wandering Detective pictures?

FUKASAKU: The system in place in those days was to let new directors make their first films as relatively short features, 60 or 65 minutes. This was to see if they had any talent. If they felt you had talent after those films, they'd let you direct the longer pictures. So those were shorter second features to the longer first features on a double bill.

CD: Your first entry in the Gang series, Gang Vs. G-Men ...

FUKASAKU: ... is the story of an ex-yakuza who becomes an undercover policeman. A role played by Koji Tsuruta.

CD: The Gang series, even though a bit old-fashioned at first, as it progressed it became more true to life, for example your League Of Gangsters – a precursor of the jitsuroku type of yakuza picture that became commonplace in the seventies. Then there were your other early yakuza pictures, like High Noon For Gangsters and Wolves, Pigs And People, which are pretty amazing, considering when you made them.

FUKASAKU: I think you're correct to say that. But the stories were all fictitious and not based on any real people or events.

CD: Do you feel that you were one of the pioneers of that jitsuroku style of yakuza picture?

FUKASAKU: Perhaps. The first film of mine that I felt really successfully blended that documentary feel with the fictitious drama was *Street Mobster*. From that film on, I was more aware of the real past and contemporary underworld, characters and events I could draw on to give the films a more reality-based feeling.

CD: You never directed any yakuza movies that could be termed ninkyo eiga. Did you not want to direct any ninkyo films?

FUKASAKU: Back then Toei had two studio branches, one in Kyoto, one in Tokyo. The one in Kyoto made the *jidai-geki* pictures, the samurai *chanbara*, and also, as the sixties progressed, the *ninkyo yakuza* films, which were also set in period – say the late Meiji era, the Taisho era, the early Showa period. I was stationed at the Tokyo branch, and we concentrated on making contemporary films. When we did *yakuza* films, they were set in a relatively contemporary time period. The *ninkyo* stories from Kyoto didn't really fit with our dramaturgy. The pictures directors like Umeji Inoue and I did in the *Gang* series, films like *Gang Vs. G-Men*, were modern-style action films, but at the same time they were not very realistic. The more realistic pictures came in with films like *Street Mobster*. I think that gives you a clear delineation.

